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REVIEW

Вх. № ПА 20-430/22.03.2024г.

of dissertation work

for the establishment of an educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the doctoral program “Economics and Management (Tourism)” of the University of Economics – Varna

1. General information

Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Georgina Lukanova, University of Economics - Varna

Grounds for writing the review: participation in the Scientific Jury, determined by order of the Rector at the University of Economics - Varna RD-06-19/02.02.2024, and decision of the first meeting of the Scientific Jury, held on February 12, 2024.

Author of the dissertation: Michaela Nikolaeva Dimitrova, a PhD student at the Department of Economics and Organization of Tourism at the University of Economics – Varna.

Topic of the dissertation: "Opportunities for sustainable development of the hotel industry in a small municipality: the case of Kavarna municipality".

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Tanya Dabeva.

2. Information about the PhD student

Michaela Nikolaeva Dimitrova is studying in the doctoral program "Economics and Management (Tourism)" at the University of Economics - Varna in the period from February 2016 to February 2019. During his studies, the PhD student successfully passed all exams of the doctoral minimum, published 2 articles, and 4 reports, and took part in one monographic work. He managed to complete all the tasks set in his plan and was discharged ahead of schedule.

Michaela Dimitrova obtained a bachelor's degree in "Tourism" at the University of Economics - Varna in 2014. One year later, in 2015, she obtained a master's degree in "International Tourism business" at the University of Economics -Varna.

Michaela Dimitrova's work experience is entirely in the field of tourism and more specifically in hospitality. She holds various positions as a bartender, waiter, and office assistant. For the last ten years until now, Michaela Dimitrova has been a Human Resources Officer at Lighthouse Golf & Spa Hotel AD, Balchik.

The presented circumstances and the attached documents show that the requirements of Art. 34, para. 1 and Art. 35 of the Regulations of the University of Economics – Varna are met and Michaela Dimitrova has the right to appear in defense of her dissertation.

3. General presentation of the dissertation (following requirements of Article 27, paragraph 2 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria)

The dissertation submitted for review has a total volume of 225 pages, of which 216 pages are main text and 5 appendices. The main text is structured according to the specific requirements of the Department of Economics and Organization of Tourism and contains the necessary components: introduction (7 pages), exposition in three chapters (chap. I – 80 pages, chap. II – 56 pages, chap. III – 60 pages, total 196 pages.), conclusion (4 pages), list of references (20 pages). The illustrative material in the exhibition comprises 22 tables and 32 figures.

The general presentation of the dissertation requires highlighting the following essential points:

The dissertation is devoted to the theoretical and empirical study of the possibilities for sustainable development of the hotel industry in a small municipality. **The relevance** of the chosen topic is related to the excessive expansion of the hotel superstructure and the associated negative consequences for the natural and social environment and, in this regard, to the need to apply the concept of sustainable

development in the hotel business to overcome environmental risks and maximize the positive aspects of the activity for the host community.

The subject and object of the study are logically derived from the aim, properly distinguished, and defined.

According to the formulated topic of the dissertation, the doctoral student specifies the **research objective**: "to derive guidelines for the application of the concept of sustainable tourism in the municipality of Kavarna by developing a plan and formulating measures for the development of sustainable hospitality." Eight **research tasks** are identified. They follow the logic of the content but could be presented more synthetically.

The **research thesis**, which specifies the essence and direction of the research, links the application of the concept of sustainable hospitality development in a small municipality with overcoming the negative consequences of tourism development and generating socio-economic benefits for the host community. Three working **hypotheses** are formulated to prove the thesis.

The research toolkit includes a range of appropriate and applicable **research methods**, including descriptive and comparative methods, inductive and deductive approaches, abstraction and specification, analysis and synthesis, and statistical methods.

The study's limitations are accurately presented.

The list of references includes 191 sources, of which 44 are in Cyrillic (Bulgarian) and 147 are in Latin (all in English). The quantitative and qualitative structure of the literature sources shows that the doctoral student has a good knowledge of the literature on the researched topic. Contemporary sources are predominant, appropriately selected, correctly interpreted, and correctly cited.

4. Assessment of the structure and content of the dissertation (compliance with the requirements of Article 34, paragraph 2 and paragraph 3 of the Regulation for the Development of the Academical Staff at the University of Economics)

The dissertation structure and content correspond to the set aim and the research tasks.

The **first chapter** of the dissertation represents the theoretical-methodological framework of the study. The deductive approach is used to move from general to particular, beginning with an overview of the concept of sustainable development in tourism and hospitality. The characteristics of sustainable development in the hospitality industry of a small municipality are then elucidated. The author presents a model for sustainable development of the hospitality industry in a small municipality and examines its stages in a logical sequence. The doctoral student demonstrates good knowledge of the main theoretical achievements on the studied topics and provides appropriate interpretation and systematization. She presents their positions in a well-reasoned manner and formulates conclusions and generalizations.

In the **second chapter**, the growth of tourism and hospitality in the municipality is evaluated by conducting a situational analysis. To test the working hypotheses, the attitudes of two focus groups, hoteliers and consumers, towards the implementation of sustainable hotel development at the local level are examined. Following the proposed methodology, the results of the statistical analyses are presented and interpreted. The doctoral student demonstrates the ability to conduct independent empirical studies and the analytical skills to formulate sound conclusions and evaluations.

In the **third chapter**, the degree of sustainability of tourism in the researched destination is evaluated using the European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS), which was developed by the EC. The results provide valuable information on the state of the available resources, infrastructure, and superstructure, their utilization, and the application of sustainable development principles. Based on the theoretical studies, the results of the analyses, and respectively the proof of the hypotheses, the author

formulates measures and actions for the effective introduction of the concept of sustainable development in the hotel industry of the researched destination, as well as a system of quantitative and qualitative indicators for monitoring their implementation.

The conclusion summarizes the implementation of research tasks and highlights the contributions of the research.

The structure and content of the dissertation fully correspond with the set scientific research aim and tasks. A good logical sequence of the structural elements has been achieved. The style of the exposition is concise and precise, and understandable scientific language is used. In general, it can be concluded that the research offers a scientific-applied solution to a real practical problem of public importance and unequivocally shows that the doctoral student has in-depth theoretical knowledge of the relevant specialty and abilities for independent scientific research.

The abstract is written according to the requirements and correctly and completely represents the main parts and content of the dissertation.

5. Identification and assessment of scientific and scientific-applied contributions in the dissertation

The submitted report on the usefulness of the dissertation contains eight contributing points. I accept these contributions, but I believe that the first contribution (commenting on a variety of authors' opinions clarifies the interrelationship between sustainable development, tourism, and hospitality) is controversial and the dissertation itself would benefit from a more synthesized description of the contributions.

6. Publications related to the dissertation

Doctoral student Mihaela Dimitrova has submitted a list of three publications on the dissertation, including 1 scientific article and 2 reports, which are closely related to the subject of the dissertation, largely reflecting its essential parts and giving it publicity. The volume of the doctoral student's scientific outputs and the nature of the

publications correspond to the requirements for acquiring the PhD degree. The report on compliance with the national requirements under the Regulations on the Implementation of the LASDRB shows achievement of the required points for acquiring the doctoral degree.

7. Detected or undetected plagiarism in the dissertation and the abstract

No plagiarism was found in the PhD thesis and the abstract submitted by Mihaela Dimitrova.

8. Critical remarks and recommendations

No significant theoretical, logical, or methodological errors were found in the doctoral thesis of Michaela Dimitrova. Some inaccuracies, mostly of a technical nature, inherent in this kind of work have been admitted. It would be interesting to study the attitudes of the municipal administration to implement the additional goals, measures, and actions for sustainable development, outside of the adopted Plan for Integrated Development of the Municipality of Kavarna for the period 2021 - 2027. I would recommend Mihaela Dimitrova as a professional in the field of tourism to continue working on the issue of sustainable development of tourism and hospitality.

8. Questions to the doctoral student

1. What are the most significant challenges facing hoteliers in the municipality of Kavarna concerning the effective implementation of the concept of sustainable development?

2. In § 3.3. of the dissertation, quantitative and qualitative indicators for monitoring the sustainable development of the hotel industry in the municipality of Kavarna are proposed. Who should carry out the monitoring and control of implementation?

10. Conclusion

The PhD thesis presented here is a completed independent research that fulfills the requirements for the award of a doctoral degree. It has achieved several scientific and scientific-applied results, which have been clearly emphasized in the text.

Based on the positive evaluation of the dissertation, as well as the scientific and scientific-applied achievements of the doctoral student, I propose that the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury make a positive decision to award the educational and scientific degree of 'Doctor' in professional field 3.9 'Tourism', scientific specialty 'Economics and Management (Tourism)' to PhD student Mihaela Dimitrova.

March 20, 2024

Varna

Reviewer:

(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Georgina Lukanova)



ИКОНОМИЧЕСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ ВАРНА

REVIEW

of dissertation

Вх. № PA20-356/08.03.2024г.

for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “**Doctor**”,
according to a procedure, announced by the University of **Economics – Varna**

1. General information

Reviewer: Prof. D.Sc. Tanya Parusheva

UNWE – Sofia, Department “Economics of Tourism”

Field of Higher Education 3. “Social, Economic and Legal Sciences”

Professional Field 3.8. “Economics”

Scientific Specialty “Economics and Management (Tourism)”

Reason for writing the review: Order No. RD-06-19/02.02.2024 of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna for the appointment of a Scientific Jury and decision from the first meeting of the Scientific Jury held on 12.02.2024.

Author of the dissertation: Mihaela Nikolaeva Dimitrova – full-time doctoral student in the Department of “Economics and Organization of Tourism” at the University of Economics – Varna

Topic of the dissertation: “Possibilities for sustainable development of hospitality in a small municipality (following the example of Kavarna municipality)”

Research supervisor: Prof. Dr. Tanya Dubeva Filipova

2. Information about the doctoral candidate

Mihaela Dimitrova graduated from the University of Economics – Varna, EQD “Bachelor”, specialty “Tourism” (2014). She obtained a Master’s degree in “International Tourism Business” at the same University (2015). She completed courses to acquire the specialties “Labor and Wages” and “Waiter-Bartender”.

Her professional development began at Kavarna LLC, Hotel “Kavarna” as a bartender (2008 – 2009). She continues to work successively at “Express Guarantee” LLC, Topola Skys complex, Topola village, Kavarna municipality; in “Traison Cliffs Golf and Spa Resort”, Bojurets village, Kavarna municipality and others, as a seasonal employee in various positions (2010 – 2013). From 2014 to the present, she is a Human Resources employee at

“Lighthouse Golf and Spa Hotel JSC”, Lighthouse Golf Resort, Balchik. She speaks English and French.

Mihaela Dimitrova is enrolled in **full-time doctoral studies** with order No. RD-17-336/01.02.2016 of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna in the field of higher education 3. “Social, economic and legal sciences”, professional direction 3.9. “Tourism”, in the doctoral program “Economics and Management (Tourism)” at the Department “Economics and Organization of Tourism”, for a period of **3 (three) years**, starting from 02.01.2016 – 02.01.2019.

She completes the work provided in the individual plan. Successfully passed the **doctoral exams** as follows:

- Hotel and restaurant management – Excellent (5.50);
- Theory of management – Very good (5.25);
- Research methodology – Excellent (5.50);
- French language – Very good (5.00).

During the period of her doctoral studies, she conducted seminars on the subject “Management of Human Resources in Tourism”. She was a reviewer of a diploma thesis on “Possibilities for the development of culinary tourism in the Razgrad region”. She participated in the doctoral level course “Strategic management” by Prof. F. Gyila, organized by the University of Economics – Varna. She took part in the “Application of innovative technologies in hotel service” project.

During her studies as a doctoral student, Mihaela Dimitrova was certified with a **positive grade**. The dissertation work was discussed at the Faculty Council of the “Economics and Organization of Tourism” department. She was dismissed with the right of defense by order No. RD 17-305/06.02.2019 of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna, effective from 01.02.2019.

A defense procedure was opened before a Scientific Jury, in accordance with Art. 31, para. 1 and para. 2 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna, Section II – Conditions and procedure for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “doctor”.

3. General presentation of the dissertation work

The dissertation work of doctoral student **Mihaela Nikolaeva Dimitrova** submitted for review, the abstract and the scientific publications related to it are the result of independent scientific research. **The actuality and significance** of the researched issues are highlighted in a well-argued and convincing manner. It is emphasized that the concept of

sustainable development has a universal character and can be applied in all economic activities. In tourism, it should contribute to overcoming the risks and maximizing the positive aspects of tourism and hotel activities.

The object of research – “*hotel industry in the municipality of Kavarna*” and **the subject of research** – “*sustainable hotel industry in a small municipality*” are correctly distinguished. **The main goal** is clearly and precisely defined: “*deriving guidelines for the application of the concept of sustainable tourism in the municipality of Kavarna, by developing a plan and formulating measures for the development of sustainable hospitality*”. The goal was achieved by solving **8 specific research tasks**.

The research thesis is appropriately formulated: “*the application of the concept of sustainable hotel development in a small municipality contributes to overcoming the negative consequences of tourism development and generating socio-economic benefits for the host community*”. **3 working hypotheses** are correctly defined.

The research toolkit includes the application of a set of **research methods and approaches**. Among them are system approach, theoretical analysis and synthesis, method of system analysis, descriptive analysis, method of abstraction and concretization, method of induction and deduction, method of field observation, statistical and descriptive methods, questionnaire survey, method of semi-structured interview. **The information provision** is based on data from a variety of *secondary sources* – monographs and scientific works by Bulgarian and foreign authors, publications of international and tourist organizations and hotel groups, plans and strategies for the development of the municipality of Kavarna, legal and normative acts, statistical directories of regional, state and international organizations, dissertations, studies, magazine articles, conference reports, specialized websites. *Primary sources* include field observations, interviews and surveys.

The main restrictions are *geographical*, related to the hotel industry in the municipality of Kavarna, and *temporal*, consistent with the duration of the tourist season in the destination. **The main problems** in the development of the dissertation work are *the lack of empirical studies* regarding the degree of application of the principles of the concept of sustainable development in the municipality of Kavarna, *the weak interest of hoteliers* and their limited cooperation in relation to the conducted survey.

The dissertation meets the requirements of Art. 27, para. 2 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

4. Assessment of the structure and content of the dissertation

The dissertation is 236 pages long. 58 tables and 36 figures are illustrated in the main text. **The structure** of the dissertation work is maintained in the spirit of well-grounded logic, consistency and connection between the treated problems. It consists of an introduction (7 pages), an exposition in three chapters (187 pages), a conclusion (4 pages) and references (18 pages). 5 appendices (20 pages) have been prepared for the dissertation work. **The bibliographic apparatus** includes 191 titles, including 131 literary sources and 60 specialized Internet sites.

Doctoral student Michaela Dimitrova **knows well** the theses and concepts of established authors on the researched problems, and successfully interprets them. Literary sources have been used in **good faith and correctly**.

The style of the thesis is concise and precise. The text is written in **scientific language**. **The content of the dissertation** testifies that the doctoral student Michaela Dimitrova has carried out a **thorough scientific study** and a very good **practical proof** of the author's goals and objectives.

The logical framework of the exhibition is presented in **the introduction**. The need to improve the possibilities for sustainable development of the hotel industry in a small municipality (following the example of the municipality of Kavarna) is substantiated.

In the **first chapter** of the dissertation "**Features of the sustainable development of the hotel industry**" the characteristic of the sustainable development of tourism in the tourist destination is examined. The research interest is focused on the characteristic features of the sustainable development of the hospitality industry. A model has been developed for the sustainable development of the hospitality industry in a small municipality. The benefits and drawbacks of the application of the principles of the concept of sustainable development in the hotel industry are indicated.

In the **second chapter** of the dissertation "**Analysis and evaluation of the hospitality industry in Kavarna municipality and its sustainability**" the characteristics of tourism in Kavarna municipality are analyzed. An in-depth analysis of the hotel superstructure in Kavarna municipality was carried out. An assessment of the attitudes of hoteliers towards sustainable development in the municipality of Kavarna was made. Consumers' attitudes towards sustainable hospitality in Kavarna municipality were assessed.

In the **third chapter** of the dissertation "**Guidelines for sustainable development of the hotel industry in Kavarna municipality**" an assessment of the degree of sustainable development of tourism in Kavarna municipality was carried out. Measures and actions have

been formulated for the development of sustainable hospitality on the territory of Kavarna municipality. A special place is dedicated to the monitoring indicators of the sustainable hotel industry on the territory of the municipality of Kavarna.

In **the conclusion**, the main analyzes and conclusions regarding the improvement of the possibilities for sustainable development of the hotel industry in a small municipality (on the example of the municipality of Kavarna) are summarized.

Outstanding scientific and scientific-applied results represent an original contribution to science. They give grounds for the conclusion that **the main goal** of the dissertation work has been **achieved**. The set research tasks have been **fulfilled**. The research thesis is **confirmed**. The formulated working hypotheses have been **proven**.

In terms of structure and content, the dissertation corresponds to the requirements of Art. 34, para. 2 and para. 3 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna, Section II – Conditions and procedure for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “doctor”.

4.1. Evaluation of the abstract of the dissertation work

The abstract is **48 pages in Bulgarian and 46 pages in English**. It correctly corresponds with the dissertation work and reliably presents the researched problems in a synthesized form. **The lexical and stylistic characteristics of the text are sustained and precise**. It consists of **6 parts**, which include: 1). general characteristics of the dissertation work; 2). structure and content of the dissertation; 3). a brief statement of the dissertation work; 4). a reference to the scientific and scientific-applied contributions in the dissertation work; 5). list of publications on the subject of the dissertation; 6). declaration of originality.

5. Identification and assessment of scientific and scientific-applied contributions in the dissertation work

Doctoral student Michaela Dimitrova **correctly formulated the contributions** in the dissertation. We assess the submitted statement of contributions as correct and realistically reflecting the achieved results.

In our opinion, **scientific and scientific-applied contributions** clearly stand out in the dissertation work, which can be summarized as follows:

first – the interrelationship between sustainable hospitality, tourism and hospitality is clarified. Theoretical knowledge has been systematized and definitions for the concepts of sustainable development, sustainable tourism, sustainable hospitality and sustainable hospitality product have been derived, adapted to the characteristics of a small municipality.

secondly – an author's model for the development of sustainable hospitality in a small

municipality was developed, which was tested on the example of the municipality of Kavarna.

third – an empirical study was conducted regarding the degree of development of sustainable hospitality in Kavarna municipality. Based on the results of the experimental application of the author's model, strategic plans have been developed for implementing the principles of the concept of sustainable development in the hotel business of Kavarna municipality.

fourth – a system of indicators for monitoring sustainable hospitality is proposed.

fifth – the presented model and plan (measures and actions) for sustainable development of the hotel industry are universal and can be applied in the hotel business in small municipalities on the territory of Bulgaria.

6. Publications and participation in scientific forums

Doctoral student Michaela Dimitrova **meets the minimum national requirements** for awarding the educational and scientific degree “doctor”, according to Art. 2b, para. 2 and para. 3 of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria. She has **3 scientific publications** directly related to the topic of the dissertation work. It has achieved points by group of indicators “G” as follows:

Articles and reports published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals and edited collective volumes.

- **1 scientific article**, independent in English, indexed in secondary databases;
- **2 independent scientific reports** in English; the first published in Turkey and the second included in the National Reference List.

The reports were printed in Proceedings of Scientific Forums as follows:

- 1). The International Sustainable Tourism and Environment Protection Conference, Edirne, Turkey, 2018, pp. 30-33.
- 2). Regional Economy and Sustainable Development, Conference Proceedings, Research Institute, University of Economics – Varna, 2018, (1) pp. 600-609.

The publications of doctoral student Mihaela Dimitrova are **representative** and **ensure sufficient dissemination of the research results** among the academic community and interested circles of the tourism business. *The scientific production, dedicated to the treated issues, meets the minimum national requirements for awarding the ESD “Doctor”, according to Art. 2b para. 2 and 3 of LDASRB and Art. 35, para. 1, item 4 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at the University of Economics – Varna, Section II – Conditions and procedure for acquiring the educational and scientific degree “doctor”.*

7. Confirmed or unconfirmed plagiarism in the dissertation or abstract

There is no proven plagiarism in the dissertation and the abstract.

8. Critical notes and recommendations

A note can be added to the dissertation that would improve the overall presentation of the work. The dissertation work would benefit if more emphasis was placed on the role of the staff in the measures and actions for sustainable development of the hotel industry in Kavarna municipality.

The mentioned note does not diminish the merits of the study and does not affect the overall positive evaluation of the dissertation work, as an independent study with indisputable scientific and scientific-applied contributions.

I recommend that doctoral student Michaela Dimitrova in her future research explore the possibilities for sustainable development of the restaurant industry, especially the tourist industry. It would also be useful to approve the author's model for sustainable development of the hotel industry in the territory of other municipalities as well.

9. Questions for the dissertation student

The investigated issue raises the following questions for a decent defense:

1. Can the measures and actions for sustainable development of the hotel industry in Kavarna municipality, proposed in the third chapter of the dissertation work, be applied to another small municipality and are they related or not to the dominant type of tourism?

2. How would you motivate hoteliers from Kavarna municipality to implement at least part of the actions you proposed for the development of sustainable hospitality?

10. Conclusion

With conviction, I give a **positive assessment** of the dissertation work on the topic "Possibilities for sustainable development of the hotel industry in a small municipality (following the example of the municipality of Kavarna)". I confirm that it fully **complies with the requirements** of LDAS in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation and the Regulations for the development of the academic staff at the University of Economics – Varna, Section II – Conditions and procedure for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

The dissertation is a **scientific-applied solution** to a real practical problem of social significance. The doctoral student has in-depth theoretical knowledge in the field of "Tourism" and the ability to conduct independent scientific research.

I propose to the respected members of the Scientific Jury to make a **decision "FOR"** the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the field of higher education

3. "Social, Economic and Legal Sciences", professional direction 3.9. "Tourism", scientific specialty "Economics and Management (Tourism)" of **MICHAELA NIKOLAEVA DIMITROVA** – full-time doctoral student in the Department of "Economics and Organization of Tourism" at the Faculty of "Management" at the University of Economics – Varna.

Sofia,
01.03.2024.

REVIEWER:
(Prof. D.Sc. Tanya Parusheva)